þÿ No More Apologies : Violence as a Trigger for Controversy over Islam in the Digital Public Sphere

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"No More Apologies" –
Violence as a Trigger for Public Controversy on Islam in the Digital Public Sphere

Violence Triggers Controversy on Islam in the Turku Stabbings

On Friday, August 18, 2017, a knife attack killed two people and wounded eight others in southwestern Finland, in the city of Turku. The suspect, an 18-year-old Moroccan man, was shot by the police amidst the attack and hospitalised with a leg wound. The attack took place in the two centrally located squares in Turku. The motive for the attack first remained unknown, but soon the police announced they were investigating the incident as a Jihadist terror attack. This was the first terrorist attack in modern Finnish history, and the first occasion in which religion was used to explain terrorist violence committed in the Finnish context (cf. Malkki & Sallamaa, 2018). Both the Finnish and international news media as well as people on social media were quick to establish a connection between religion and the violent attack in Turku after learning that the perpetrator was a young Moroccan man and an asylum seeker.

This connection between Islam and terrorism on social media, we argue, follows a pattern, already apparent in the post-9/11 news scheme, in which militancy and extremism have become prominent topics in the news on Islam and politics (see e.g. Powell, 2011; Cottle, 2006). Islam is thus frequently linked to contemporary terrorism in news media portrayals as well as in social media reactions, often being framed as an inherently violent religion. Such religious essentialisation is readily used as an explanation for terrorist violence (Semati, 2011), framing 'Islamist terrorist attack' as fundamentally more threatening and more evil than 'secular violence', foregrounding the role of religion in terrorist violence and shaping, in particular, how Islam is framed in the digital public sphere.

In this article, we wish to examine in empirical detail *how* controversy over Islam as triggered by violence was discursively articulated in the Turku stabbings context. We look at the different constructions of Islam associated with violence and the various stances in the public debate, enacted by different actors participating in the debate in the digital public sphere, namely, Twitter. We draw on the premise of the social construction of public controversy and how controversies are profoundly shaped by the digital communicative conditions and structures in which they take

place – here, Twitter as a digital platform for public debate (see also Murthy, 2018; Volkmer, 2014) – and consequently influence public opinion on the relationship between Islam and terrorist violence in society.

In our investigation, we apply a multi-method approach combining different methods of collecting and analysing data. The social media material consists of Twitter data covering the first 17 days after the stabbings. This material was collected by using automated tweet collection. We introduce to media studies the Latourian-inspired method, cartography of controversies (Venturini, 2010a, 2010b). As the word *cartography* implies, the method allows us to navigate the digital terrains, to connect actors to statements, observe networks and debates emerging therein. In order to contextualise the debate and to situate it in the specific digital, cultural and societal context, we apply *digital media ethnography* as a complementary tool to collect and analyse material (see e.g. Hine, 2015; Markham, 2017). Digital media ethnographic approach, we argue, allows for a more culturally sensitive way of tracing alliances and oppositions evoked by the violent Turku incident and enables deeper, contextually embedded understanding of the various stances. We apply discourse analysis (see also Jones, Chik & Hafner, 2015) to analyse the content of the statements, comments and arguments posted and shared on Twitter. In our investigation, we give special focus to *statements*, *comments* and *arguments* that point to the different actors and their positions in the public controversy. Tracing statements concerning the Turku attacks allows us to examine the discursive construction of 'the terrorist' (see also Hülsse & Spencer, 2008) and how Islam figures in these constructions constituted in the digital public sphere of Twitter.

The article is divided into three parts. First, we outline the idea of public controversy and discuss the theoretical roots of this concept. We begin with a moral philosophical discussion by sketching the Lyotard–Habermas debate on public controversy and compound this with current research on the digital public sphere as a platform for today's public controversies. Second, we provide an empirical analysis of the Turku stabbings by applying a multi-method approach and articulate in particular three discursive strategies used in constructing the controversy over Islam and terrorist violence. These discursive strategies are debates concerning: *scapegoating*, *essentialisation* and *racialisation* of the Muslim Other. Third, we reflect our empirical findings by critically discussing the ways in which the digital public sphere impacts Habermasian consensus and Lyotardian dissensus oriented argumentation. What follows, instead, is a condition of a stagnant public debate.

Public Controversy in the Digital Public Sphere

Lyotard–Habermas Debate

Concepts are both enabling and constraining. By highlighting the nature of public debate as one of disagreement and polyphony, the concept of 'controversy' allows us to focus on the various, contested voices engaged in the debate while downplaying consensus and agreement in voice (see also Lundby, 2018, p. 4). Theoretically speaking, 'controversy' takes the reader to one of the seminal debates in modern social and political theory started by Jürgen Habermas (1962/1989) and his idea of the public sphere. According to Habermas' (1962/1989) argument, the public sphere lies between the state and civil society. As Manuel Castells (2008) explains, "the public sphere is an essential component of sociopolitical organization because it is the space where people come together as citizens and articulate their autonomous views to influence the political institutions of society" (p. 78). How this process of articulation of 'autonomous views' is carried out and what kind of purposes they may, or even, should serve, is a subject of major intellectual dispute.

One of the key critiques of the Habermasian thinking comes from Jean-François Lyotard and his followers. Lyotard (1979/1984) severely critiques Habermas for his constitution of ideal speech acts and the universal ideals of consensus as the basis for modern liberal democratic political decision-making in society. Having famously rejected metanarratives, for Lyotard (1979/1984) Habermas offers yet another metanarrative, that is, a general narrative of emancipation which Lyotard (1979/1984) cannot accept as a legitimation strategy in postmodern political thought (p. 60). For Lyotard, this preoccupation with metanarratives must be replaced with a new conception of political discourse, in which the focus is on controversy and on contest of local narratives and incommensurable language games. This dissensus-oriented view does not aim at final resolution (i.e. consensus) but rather toward creative and novel statements with dissensus as an ongoing condition of political debate in postmodern public sphere (cf. Fairfield, 1994; Rorty, 1985; cf. Mouffe, 2000, 2005; Papacharissi 2010).

The Digital Public Sphere

Since the times of Lyotard's and Habermas' original writings in the 1970s and 1980s, the idea of public controversy and related public debate carried out in the public sphere has been in flux. One of the main reasons has to do with changes in the communication environment, in particular

globalisation and digitalisation of media communication. There are three key themes we can identify in the present media environment that influence the communicative dynamics around public controversy. First, the boundaries of the idea of the public sphere are on the move, as the sphere of communication has transformed from local and national contexts to transnational, even global frameworks (see e.g. Fraser, 2014; Castells, 2008). Media theorist Ingrid Volkmer (2014, pp. 8–9) argues:

> Public communication is no longer 'local', 'national', or transnational but rather constitutes 'reflexive' communication, which unfolds across a sphere of globalized 'reflective' interdependence. Reflective interdependence related here to horizontal spheres where the core domains of 'communicative action', 'justification', 'verification', 'engagement' are no longer – together – necessarily embedded in the bounded discourse of a community or nation but scattered across different discursive sites within globalized communicative horizons. These spheres of reflective interdependence are positioned in the trajectories of such a 'scattered' territory of public communication, not only overcoming national borders but breaking up paradigmatic boundaries of the global 'North' and 'South', the 'centre' and 'periphery', of individual 'utterance' and public agency.

Similarly, following Volkmer (2014), we may argue that digitalisation of the public sphere has brought about multiplication of the sites of public controversy as well as the complex and multi-layered relationships between different communicative horizons.

Second, as is well acknowledged, the boundaries between 'the public' and 'the private' are constantly changing, influencing the conditions of public controversy in the present digital communication environment. Digital media scholar Zizi Papacharissi (2010) underlines connectivity between the public and the private as sites of civic activity. She explains how "contemporary civic tendencies are characterized by a variety of atomized actions, taking place in a plurality of spaces that are both public and private" (p. 131), underlining the importance of seeing the private as an essential space from which civic activity in our networked society can be executed. Thus, rather than separate, private and public become entangled, where the private sphere "enables connectivity from spaces that the individual delineates as private" (p. 138). Private thus denotes a space designated for "private pursuit", even if in actuality in a public place.

Third, this condition in which the boundaries between the public and the private are under negotiation means the ideals of communication by a variety of publics are also on the move. These changes, unavoidably, shape the conditions of and for public controversy. Terje Rasmussen (2016, pp. 80–81) explains:

> the Internet plays an active role in the current dramatic differentiation of the public sphere, in terms of topics debated, styles applied and persons involved. The diversity of communication on the Internet is in part caused by (1) anonymity and quasi-oral styles of communication facilitating extreme viewpoints, uncivil characteristics, and unconventional ways of argumentation; (2) diversity of communicative forms and genres (in social media like Facebook, chat fora, Twitter, blogs and homepages with comment functions), and (3) diversity of intertextual connections among online fora (hyperlinks, RSS feeds, social media, search engines).

Consequently, different types of controversial content now circulate globally and attain very specific audience(s) that do not necessarily engage with audiences with different views. Thus, segmentation, exacerbated by algorithmic personalisation and 'algorithmic gatekeeping' (Bozdag, 2013), has a significant influence on today's digitally driven public debate (e.g. van Dijck, 2013). This tends to cause social 'bubbles', which again may encourage polarisation of communication around contested matters, with Islam and terrorist violence here a case in point (see e.g. Awan, 2014 on online Islamophobia and Twitter).

In other words, as the (mass mediated) public sphere transformed into a *digital public sphere*, it expanded, diversified and became more complex. These changes have challenged both the notion of publics and the notion of spheres (and the relationships between them), as well as the styles of communication in the present digital public sphere. This may result in a difficulty in connecting heterogeneous and fragmented "conversations" to "a notion of valid public opinion", crucial for deliberate democratic societies to function (Gripsrud & Moe, 2010, p. 10). Digital public sphere, then, can be characterised as an arena for both individualisation and segmentation of contemporary public debate and related opinion (e.g. Rasmussen, 2016). It is therefore justified to argue that the digital public sphere is anything but a homogenous discursive space for public controversy.

Twitter as a digital public sphere consists of certain special elements that are important to acknowledge when analysing public controversy in this digital platform. Most importantly,

controversy on Twitter is typically a hashtag-constructed phenomenon; controversies on Twitter are made by hashtags, not born out of thin air (see also Vis, 2013). Hashtags simultaneously function to mark experiential topics and enact interpersonal relationships, as well as organise text (Zappavigna, 2015). Furthermore, hashtags offer a search functionality, constituting one of the most important semiotic resources enabling 'searchable talk' (Zappavigna, 2015). As a digital public sphere, Twitter relies on reachability and connectivity. Hashtag searchability also contributes to the generation of social 'bubbles' mentioned earlier, as users seek out specific conversations in this given digital public sphere. At the same time, searchability opens up avenues for conflict and disagreement by enabling opposing voices to join the conversation.

Furthermore, hashtags that organically emerge on Twitter at times of unexpected events, also called "issue-response hashtags", can be viewed as affordances that allow for momentary connectedness, a form of online publicness in this digital public sphere (Rathnayake & Suthers, 2018). To follow Crawford's (2010, pp. 148–149) insight, Twitter as a public sphere, as simultaneously public in reach and private in effect, moves between the public and the private or the intimate. Thus, public controversies in this public sphere are rendered and re-rendered through a multitude of subjective viewpoints expressed, posted and shared in tweets and re-tweets reaching heterogenous publics as well as social and conversational 'bubbles'. This simultaneous multidimensionality of Twitter (bringing together but also separating different publics, spheres and hashtag-driven communication styles) makes the analysis of public controversy a highly complex matter.

Mapping of Digital Public Sphere(s)

A Multi-Method Approach

A multi-method perspective allows us to acknowledge the complexity of the issue of public controversy in a given digital context in a more nuanced manner. Controversy over Islam and terrorist violence traverse the digital public sphere. Hence, we first needed to begin mapping and tracking the controversy in question. In the process of mapping, we moved from *statements* to debates (what), from *debates* to actors (who), from *actors* to networks (how), from *networks* to cosmoses (where), from *cosmoses* all the way to *cosmopolitics* (when) to map out a cartography (see also Venturini, Ricci, Mauri, Kimbell & Meurnier, 2015). It is important to acknowledge that

cartography of controversy as a method of analysis of public debates has been developed to address debates *not yet closed*; thus,

> describing a controversy is telling a story that does not end at the close of the narration (and further developments might well deny all that was said before), [and] narration is not enough to tame controversies; exploration is necessary as well. (Venturini et al., 2015, p. 83)

This said, mapping social controversies is a complex matter, filled with uncertainties regarding the nature of actors, groups and the statements expressed in those debates (see also Latour, 2005). What is more, as controversies traverse between the online and the offline and within Twitter as a digital public sphere, the voices we as cartographers are able to map online represent only a fraction of society. Controversy analysis is, therefore, always partial (Marres, 2015).

To provide a more contextualised perspective to the analysis, digital media ethnographic approach is applied to complement cartographic tracing of the public debate at stake. In other words, while cartography of controversies enables the mapping of actors and statements and thereby the emerging networks of opinion, digital media ethnography brings an important socio-cultural dimension into the analysis and interpretation by allowing the researcher to observe the wider digital, cultural and societal context in which these debates take place (see e.g. Hine, 2015; Bakardjieva, 2011). Here, we reflect in particular on Twitter as a public sphere driven by a certain logic of hashtag circulation as well as consider the larger cultural and societal context in which Islam and violence typically appear in the current public sphere, namely migration, racism and economic insecurity (e.g. Saeed, 2007; Semati, 2010).

Scholars of terrorism Rainer Hülsse and Alexander Spencer (2008, p. 576) argue for the relevance of discourse-analytical examination in explaining terrorism as socially constructed phenomenon. In our analysis, then, we aim at identifying the different understandings the public has of terrorist violence evoked by the Turku attack and how the different positions make up the controversy. Discourse analysis is used to establish the various debates and networks that emerge when mapping the chosen token in order to establish the various stances and positions taken in the debate by various actors (Marres, 2015; see also Jones et al., 2015). Discourse analysis helps recover what the debate is about, what the public controversy concerns, how it is debated in a given public sphere and who the actors are that participate in this public debate.

The empirical data was collected from Twitter using an automated tweet collection method. It covers the first 17 days after the attack. On Twitter, the selection of a specific hashtag both guides and delimits data collection and the available empirical material. This is necessary given the vast amount of information hosted by the platform, but also restricting given the multitude of possible tokens in a given research context. The more general hashtags, while potentially suitable, also pick out a wide array of strings not directly linked to the object of research (e.g. #terroristattack or even #Turku). In this study, we used the issue-response hashtag #TurkuAttack as the epicentre of our cartography, i.e. the starting point of mapping and data collection. The choice to select #TurkuAttack follows a certain logic: it is specific enough to narrow the search to this specific event, yet it links the tweets intertextually to other similar attacks, and via that, to existing socio-political debates.

Cartographic Revelations: Three Discursive Strategies of Constructing Islam

We established three discursive strategies that, we argue, frame the ways in which violence triggered controversy over Islam in the debate after the Turku attack: *scapegoating*, *essentialisation* and *racialisation*. Controversies necessarily entail disagreement, yet they often share "a base of shared notions" (Venturini, 2010b, p. 804). All three discursive strategies are linked to security discourses that not only reference physical threats of violence but also wider socio-economic issues, for example, concerns of insecurity associated with job security and welfare, as well as concerns regarding the loss of national and cultural identity (see also Buonfino, 2004). These varied perceptions of threat emerge from cultural, racial and religious differentiation variably articulated by the actors; the Muslim Other becomes a site of competing discourses over national and international politics in the digital public sphere.

Scapegoating – Debate Over Blame for Terrorist Violence

The act of terrorist violence in Turku sparked a debate about the causes of and reasons for terrorism, and many were quick to point the finger at Islam. Religious scapegoating is neither new nor restricted to Islam (e.g. Juergensmeyer, 2017). Scapegoating is often fed by present-day feelings of social and economic insecurity and growing inequality (see e.g. Kilp, 2011). The security discourses visible in the empirical material construct various kinds of threats whereby the Muslim Other becomes the scapegoat for not only terrorist violence but also the current socio-

economic condition characterised by insecurity. The statements blaming Islam on Twitter tend to be totalising, leaving very little room for negotiation needed for achieving consensus:

> #turkuattack It's time to start telling the truth about Islam. No more apologies.

The self-assigned righteousness in the above tweet is replicated in many others that claim to preach 'the truth' about Islam. Scapegoating offers a venting opportunity and may even act as a coping mechanism where assuming a guilty party helps construct clarity and offers avenues for prevention (e.g. halting immigration). Blame is rarely unilateral, however; below, blame for the attack is assigned to Islam but also to the political left, i.e. the 'liberals' or the 'green left', because of their immigration politics:

> Liberals will still say in 2017 that muslims have nothing to do with TERRORISM #turkuattack #IslamIsTheProblem #GoTrump

Digital media ethnographic investigation reveals, however, that there were also a great number of those who held more open views toward immigration. The image of the Muslim Other emerges in these conflicting discourses as either a subject in need of humanitarian help or, stemming from collectivising orientalism, a scapegoat for terrorism inclusive of a whole category of people, constructed as culturally inferior and uncivilised. These themes re-emerged after the stabbings with new-found fervour, stirring feelings of dormant hatred as well as increasing violent behaviour toward the already marginalised. The controversy concerning blame reveals not only the need to assign blame in order to understand what is happening and to guide efforts to regain safety, but also a great division concerning how violence is understood. Scapegoating Islam for terrorist violence removes the white Western (non-Muslim) actor from the discourse of terrorist violence, thereby rendering violent acts carried out by non-Muslims as less disconcerting. Here, a negotiatory tweet underlines how it is *all* violence that should be condemned, regardless of the ideological reasons behind it:

> So much hypocrisy as people are panicking about the attacks and being hostile against whole groups of people - they are thus instigating discrimination and violence against innocent Muslims. We must condemn violence. It is practiced by neo-nazis and jihadists alike and you probably don't want to encourage either of these? #turkuattack [translated from Finnish]

Participating in the debate over blame, this Twitter user (above) distinguishes between religion and violence, alluding instead to the role of ideology in acts of violence (be it neo-Nazis or jihadists). Both ideologies, embodied in the neo-Nazi and the jihadist, have their roots in a sense of superiority (see also e.g. Morris, 2014), which also serves as the basis of racial and religious discrimination in the debate at hand. The Turku attack stirred a controversy not because of the violence *per se* but because of the perpetrator, seen as representing something not fitting in Finnish society. The concerns for increasing societal division and the increased assaults on the Muslim community in the wake of the stabbings are echoed below:

> Sorry for result #turkuattack will have on Finnish Muslim community and immigrants from MENA. (Mena refers to Migration from the Middle East and North Africa).

Due to pre-existing concerns about safety due to the 'refugee crisis', the stabbings only served to materialise existing fears of a section of society, fuelling the immigration debate and making new links between asylum seekers and terrorism:

> Politicians' logic: set a fire and then wonder why it is so difficult to put it out. #terrorism #asylumseeker #Islamism #turkuattack [translated from Finnish]

The Turku attack thus offered a convenient political weapon supporting pre-existing anti-immigration attitudes, particularly anti-Muslim sentiment and nationalism, while deepening the divide between political views. Scapegoating is a generalising practice of assigning blame that leaves no space for individual differences; with that, the possibility of placing blame on a guilty individual is also erased, and instead, a whole group of people is implicated.

The examples above showcase the diverse communicative functions of hashtags and their role in participating in the debate despite the actor's positioning. In sum, scapegoating religion for violence is used as justification for anti-immigration views and as a vehicle for rallying nationalist ideals. Terrorist violence is harnessed for legitimising the political agenda for stricter immigration policy. Characterisation of Islam as evil is fundamental for scapegoating to work: the controversy around religious essentialisation is discussed next.

Essentialisation – Debate Over 'Real Islam'

Essentialisation refers to a line of thinking whereby social groups are considered as having inherent defining properties, some unchangeable characteristics common to the group members (Toosi & Ambady, 2011). Essentialisation of religious identities (e.g. Beaman, 2013) is not restricted to Islam (Juergensmeyer, 2017); however, essentialising Islam as violent (e.g. Semati, 2011) or evil enables scapegoating in the context of terrorist violence:

> Religion, the root cause of all evil #turku #turkuattack #terrorism #terrorist [translated from Finnish]

Essentialised caricatures (Beaman, 2013) obscure the complexity of religion. The debate about the constitution of 'real Islam' culminates in speculations of 'religious violence', which makes a problematic distinction between religious violence as opposed to 'secular violence' (see Gunning & Jackson, 2011). Security discourses of threat divide the nation into victims and perpetrators and draw on the simplistic notion of Islam as violent religion. Demonising religion increases threat perceptions based on religious identity that is detrimental to the whole Muslim community. There are voices that fight against such generalisation and aim to diversify the public conception of what it means to be Muslim, emphasising the need to separate terrorism from Islam:

> We #Ahmadiyya #Muslim community always stand against #Violence and #terrorism May #Finland remain safe country

It is important to see how Muslim communities thus participate in defining their religion in the digital public sphere and express condemnation toward terrorist violence. Furthermore, characterisation of terrorist violence as evil diverts attention away from questions of cause or motivation for these acts of violence by already posing evilness as the cause (Spencer, 2010). In this debate over what constitutes Islam, religion is posited as the cause, namely the evil nature of the religion. Thus, the debate over the constitution of Islam, of what 'real Islam' is, revolves around the binary of good and evil.

However, despite shows of solidarity that take many forms, no genuine dialogue between camps of opposing views is ever really established; rather, it is a game of offence–defence. For example, Islam being a 'religion of peace' is a commonly used ironic remark that gets to the root of essentialised Islam:

> Wasn't Islam supposed to be a religion of peace and Muslims nice? #Turkuattack

[translated from Finnish]

Perceptions of threat oscillate between what is considered a potential threat manifested in fear of the Other to actual threat manifested in acts of terrorist violence: in a vicious circle, violence evokes the religious scapegoat. Threat becomes symbolic and harboured in the Muslim figure (see also Sumiala, Valaskivi, Tikka & Huhtamäki, 2018). Because it is a very embodied type of threat perception, but also because the so-called new terrorism (see Tucker, 2001) has no country, such dormancy of threat is very powerful in instigating fear. The construction of a common Muslim enemy through scapegoating and essentialisation invites counter-discourses denying the characterisation of Muslims as terrorists:

> y'all trying to make #turkuattack about muslims. Muslims didn't do it. Terrorists aren't muslims.

At the same time, the common enemy rhetoric gives rise to the imagery of the 'enemy among us', leaving *us* vulnerable against *them*. Polarisation between good and evil, between *us* and *them*, is prevalent in the Twitter discourse and brings with it the danger of growing societal division. The debate consists of concerned voices that aim to negotiate the divide via appeals to shared humanity:

> Incredibly sad to hear this?? Let's not let this divide us, but rather bring us closer together! #turkuattack #Turku

Essentialising religion as violent thus enables scapegoating strategies and allows assigning blame. Likewise, racialising terrorist violence generates similar negative effects, discussed next.

Racialisation – Debate Over Characterisation of the Muslim Other

Racialisation stems from racial, ethnic and cultural representations of the Other as different from *us* and often "rests in the centrality of Whiteness – its normativity and invisibility" (Jiwani, 2006, p. 6). The process of racialisation essentially involves the assignment of negative attributes and negative evaluations. It is important to note the difference between racialisation and racism; this 'new racism' departs from 'biological racism' and is built on discourses of Otherness, restricting individuals' rights on the basis of being perceived as not fitting or not belonging to the culture and society (Dunn, Klocker & Salabay, 2007). Thus, the process of racialisation does not necessarily involve 'race' in terms of genetics; rather, racialisation can also "operate through asserted cultural

features, such as religious performances" (Dunn et al., 2007, p. 565). Racialisation of terrorist violence, then, constructs it as different from other types of violence by linking it to race or ethnicity, thereby also rendering this quality characteristic of said group of people. This negative stereotyping, constructing terrorist violence as inherently Islamic, is at the heart of the controversy as people debate in the digital public sphere about what constitutes terrorism.

Portraying Islam as 'non-European' highlights cultural incompatibility and helps construct Europe as somewhat unitary and Islam as foreign. Constructing 'an imagined cultural community' of Europe, using #DefendEurope, elicits a shared Europeanness (Lähdesmäki, 2012):

> #invasion #turkuattack #wakeupeurope #migri #DefendEurope #outwiththeshit #closetheborders #startdeportations [translated from Finnish]

The Western media landscape contributes to a very specific racial imagery of terrorist violence (see also Spencer, 2010) where European victimhood is opposed with the racialised 'common enemy' in the image of the Muslim. These two tweets tap into this European imagination where the Muslim Other "haunts our society, 'our international community'" (Semati, 2010, p. 257). Linking Turku stabbings with the Barcelona attacks (below) that took place the previous day connects Turku to a string of attacks and to the shared European victimhood, setting Europeanness against the "alien other" (Saeed, 2007). The terrorist Other is but one articulation of the Muslim Other that has no place in the imagined shared Europeanness:

> Why are #Moroccans allowed into Europe? They are nearly involved in every Jihadist attack. #BarcelonaTerrorAttack #turkuattack

The interpretative frames construed by these tweets draw on a specific socio-economic imagination where European affluence is juxtaposed with the dire conditions leading up to the recent immigration to Europe from non-European countries. All these discourses form a global network, a cosmos of opinion that is the digital public sphere, infiltrated by local (in terms of location of attack) and national perspectives (here, Finnish) that illuminate different aspects of the debate, some of which contest labelling the incident a terrorist attack:

> This illustrates the racist nature of the whole incident as white Finnish people guilty of similar acts are not accused of terrorism #Turku #Turkuattack [translated from Finnish]

Furthermore, racialisation of terrorist violence in the context of Islam has become fused with racialised masculinity (see Britton, 2018) that renders the Muslim man violent and dangerous, manifest in security discourses around rape in the context of immigration. The image of the Muslim man thus suffers from the conflation of race, culture, religion and violence:

> #parliament #finlandfirst #terror #finlandattack #Turku #turkuattack #refugees #pakoLoiset #rapefugees #startdeportations #muslims [translated from Finnish]

Making a geographical and religious link by coining 'rapefugees', this comment makes a connection between rape, Islamic culture and immigration. The orientalist discourse constructs the Other as less civilised and more brutal. Race and racism elicit a lot of debate in the context of violence. Although cartography reveals polyphonic voices, no real engagement emerges that would develop the argument. Some, feeling perhaps their views are not being heard, claim that in the current political climate and cultural ethos of tolerance it is not possible to oppose or to be critical about immigration without being accused of racism:

> The #greenlefties always want to accuse all the people concerned about their safety of being racist #turkuattack #islamist [translated from Finnish]

Occasionally, historically significant events are alluded to in order to create unity; a conciliatory tweet reminds us of times when racial prejudice and hatred reared its ugly head:

> "Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars." Martin Luther King Jr. #turkuattack

To sum up, the anti-Muslim sentiment is reproduced through the process of racialisation of terrorist violence by constructing the Muslim Other as a unified category identifiable by the characteristic of violence; at the same time, it constructs whiteness, including white Finnishness, as superior and detached from terrorist violence. Discourses racialising 'the common enemy to Europe' as Muslim also invite counter-discourses contesting this characterisation. Yet, despite the polyphonic nature of online debates, the different voices scatter.

The Paradox of Dissensus and Consensus

In this article, we have examined the public controversy around Islam as evoked by violence in the case of the Turku stabbings in 2017. The empirical analysis of mapping controversies in the

digital public sphere combined with digital media ethnography and discourse analysis makes explicit that Islam as a religion is inherently part of this controversy triggered by the stabbings and the related threat to the social order in society. Because the digital public sphere provides access to religion, it also makes it a topic of public debate and concern. The key discursive strategies in positioning Islam in the public controversy examined here have to do with its scapegoating, essentialisation and the process of racialisation of terrorist violence as well as of the Muslim Other. All these discursive strategies link Islam as a religion to violence and terrorism; furthermore, stemming from cultural, racial and religious differences, these discursive strategies give rise to multifarious threat perceptions that again serve as a basis for an evaluative framework that privileges and elevates the dominant secular, Western, white subject. Namely, the nationalist discourses in the debate contribute to framing Islam, and more generally the Arab world, as an enemy against the West and its values (see also Powell, 2011). This debate in the digital public sphere is fuelled by the notion of Islam as an "all-encompassing religion that addresses all aspects of individual and social life" (Roy, 2004, p. 109), making it incompatible with Western values (including, for example, freedom, individual choice, democracy and equality). Similarly, conceptualisations of 'new terrorism', the perception of terrorist violence as purely 'religious violence', deepen the secular–religious divide in Western society, tarnishing religion and rendering Islam uncivilised (see e.g. Tucker, 2001).

And yet, the public discourse of blaming Islam for the stabbings is not the only discursive frame of interpreting and explaining the attacks in the digital material examined here. In line with the idea of public controversies in the digital public sphere, other voices are also claimed. Some of these voices take a stand for Islam and condemn and refuse the naturalised connection between Islam, violence and terrorism. Judging from the usernames and content of these messages, some of the actors (e.g. publics) standing with Islam have Muslim background and feel insulted by the essentialised argumentation simplifying Islam as a terrorist religion. However, what is noteworthy in the digital material is the imbalance between voices defending and condemning Islam, with those blaming and accusing Islam voicing their views in a loud and hostile manner. The counter-voices that stand with Islam and reject the prominent discursive frame of interpretation also trigger considerable amounts of negative feedback. The multiplicity of voices and arguments in this public controversy is thus divided in the digital public sphere of Twitter in a highly unequal manner, to say the least.

Moreover, the public controversy stirred by the stabbings and the related religious connection extends beyond the debate on Islam as a violent religion. In many posts and comments, the debate on and around Islam ties in with the broader scenario of threats linked with wider socio-economic and political issues concerning matters such as national safety, national and European immigration politics, culture and race, as well as in the Finnish context, the future of the welfare state. Typical of the digital public sphere, these local and national debates triggered by the stabbings are immediately merged with the European and even global debates regarding similar issues and concerns. Looking from this perspective, Islam becomes a trigger that raises broader societal and economic concerns about the future development of the values in Western societies.

As a methodological reflection, a cartography of controversy offers a fruitful way to examine collective existence, the social life of actors and conflicts that arise from such public debates. In a Latourian (2005) spirit, cartography provides a relational view of the assemblage of actors in examining a controversy. In this line of thinking, the controversy on religion triggered by the Turku stabbings is also part of larger meta-controversies (concerning migration, safety and the future of 'Western' values in contemporary multicultural societies) as well as being composed of sub-controversies (such as the debate that aims to challenge the naturalised connection between Islam and terrorism). Cartographers, then, must situate their case study in the "scale of disputes" to which it belongs and show how controversies always entail conflicting worldviews (Venturini, 2010b). This goes back to the Lyotard–Habermas debate and the dispute about dissensus and/or consensus as a premise, and as an aim in today's public debate concerning religion in society. As discussed earlier in this article, globalisation and digitalisation of the public sphere have profoundly altered the dynamics as well as the scale of contemporary public debate on religion. Local debates intersect with transnational and global debates and vice versa. The discursive scheme of essentialising and naturalising Islam as a violent, terrorist religion is by no means local or a national, Finnish invention, but follows an already established interpretive frame familiar from other recent terror attacks in Europe and elsewhere in the Western world (see also Sumiala et al., 2018).

What we witness, then, is a paradoxical situation, a simultaneous dissensus and consensus as a prevalent condition and social reality. On the one hand, Twitter as a digital public sphere provides a relatively unlimited context and an opportunity for expressing voices that blame and accuse Islam of violence and terrorism, establishing Islam a major threat in and for the modern, Western society.

These loud voices, expressed by multiple actors in the digital public sphere of Twitter, do not seek consensus in a sense of trying to find ways to include Islam as part of the society. However, there seems to be at least an implicit consensus among these voices on rejecting and refusing Islam in Finland (and in other Western societies, for that matter) as the only way to guarantee safety and peace in society. Part of this political discourse is to assign blame to and place responsibility with those actors (e.g. politicians) in society who are not willing to see Islam as a threat, and who thus put their citizens in danger.

One the other hand, the public controversy associated with Islam in Twitter as a digital public sphere also includes voices that refuse and disagree with the essentialised conception of Islam as inherently violent. Among these voices, there seems to be a certain consensus concerning the need to de-construct the very naturalised connection made between Islam and terrorism. The dissensus, again, is embedded in the very premises and outcomes of the controversy on Islam between 'the blamers' and 'the defenders'. The analysed data provides very little empirical evidence of any attempt to even try to find common or shared ground for agreement or understanding the different viewpoints. Instead, we identify discursive strategies (such as debate over scapegoating, essentialisation and racialisation) that, rather than drive consensus, aim at enforcing polarisation and demonisation not only of the subject matter of dispute (e.g. Islam) but also of those actors (e.g. publics) who participate in the public debate and express opposing views on the controversy. While there is very little indication of Habermasian (1962/1989) consensus as a shared purpose of public debate between the different voices, Lyotardian (1979/1984) contradiction does not seem to generate much progress, either. Instead, we witness a state of stagnation in which the different publics in the controversy are left shouting out their views with very little communication with each other, let alone a sense of purpose or goal other than dispute and conflict in itself. For future scholarship on public controversy regarding religion in the digital public sphere, more theoretical and empirical research is needed to find out workable ways to move on from this intellectual and political condition we seem to be stuck with in today's digital public sphere when dealing with terrorist violence and its relationship with Islam.

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